



United States Mission to the OSCE

OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism Intervention for Session 3

As prepared for delivery by Fred Zeidman,
Chairman, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council
Berlin, April 28, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

As you know, I chair the governing council of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and I follow the news very closely, especially as it relates to understanding of the history of the Holocaust and contemporary anti-Semitism. We all know that reports of anti-Semitic acts in parts of Europe and elsewhere are on the rise. That's why we have all come together at this important conference. We know the problem, and we and our political leaders have committed our countries to do something about it.

We all know that the situation in the Middle East, and, more specifically, in Israel, is immersed in political turmoil with clear issues of anti-Jewish, anti-Israel, anti-Muslim, and anti-American sentiments. With all this as background, it should be obvious that we understand and appreciate the dangers of hatred and extremism and the importance of diversity in a global society, and the need to learn and practice true tolerance.

There are essentially three principles that I would offer as a means for understanding how Holocaust education creates the possibility for substantial diversity training. First, Holocaust education is about accurately understanding the history of the Holocaust. The first step towards ensuring the dissemination of real, accurate and relevant information is to make that information easily accessible. We at the USHMM work daily to ensure that all peoples around the world have access to significant and substantial information that presents and accurate portrayal of the Holocaust.

The ways in which we are able to teach this history are many. We host scholarly conferences, issue publications, support research, and share that research on the history of the camps, the rescuers, the ghettos and so on. We sponsor teacher workshops to help teachers understand the fundamentals of Holocaust history and to guide them in pedagogical methods for teaching this history to people of all ages. We work directly with youth, police organizations, church groups, businesses, government officials, diplomats, and the general public. These programs are all intimately connected to and integrated into our website and distance learning initiatives. In fact, the Internet plays an integral role in all of the museum's educational work. So, we must all do our utmost, not only to make sure that we are teaching history honestly and accurately, but also that we are making it easily accessible to all.

This brings me to the second principle: fairness in approaching the history that we teach. All groups struggle with the challenge of appropriately understanding history – both others' and their

own. Of course, every nation would prefer to be understood and remembered in a positive way. Yet, we all know that no nation bears an unblemished past. Rather, every nation must contend with the choices and acts that others have made or committed on behalf of that nation in the distant and recent past. Certainly this is as true of my own country as it is of many others, and we make that clear in the museum's permanent exhibition. We are honest about what the U.S. did – and did not do – during the Holocaust. In other words, we've got to face our own history do it honestly.

However, we must also accept that no learning can proceed unless there is a willingness on the part of the learner to embrace the information presented. Accuracy of information is essential, but it can do no real good unless the student is receptive.

A willingness to learn necessitates clear leadership in getting people to a place where they can accept the hard truths. Leadership does not just happen. It must be cultivated and integrated for the larger goals of tolerance and understanding. At the museum we have developed a corps of teachers who have learned the history accurately and, who, over time, have been given the opportunity to develop the skills and the convictions necessary to help teachers, schools and other programs to incorporate the history of the Holocaust intelligently and successfully into their school curricula. With our police programs, we have worked with the established leaders to train and promote policemen and women who can train others under their command. They not only learn this history, but also train their own people to teach it, to promote it and to incorporate it into their training and active programs.

With our youth initiatives, we have trained young adults to work with the thousands of sometimes disaffected youth who come into our programs. These people begin their work with the younger generation, but they also help with police training and church outreach programs. In each case, out of the groups that we bring together and train come the next leaders, who spread out through society to teach the history to ever broadening circles of society. This creates a depth of ownership and understanding of the history, which is critical to moving to the bigger world of learning about tolerance and diversity.

Finally, information must be relevant to the audience. Today we are facing new and repeated incidents and levels of anti-Semitism. Which elements of the history of the Holocaust actually pertain to the particular and specific events we are addressing today? The Holocaust consumed 12 years of European life, spanning 18 different countries occupied or invaded by the Nazis. We all know that the acts and atrocities committed are a warning of the possible outcomes of anti-Semitism unguarded. But which events during that tragic period can tell us what might have been done to limit or entirely avoid the horrors of the era? Which acts can help guide us in our actions today? Our political leaders are committed to action, and our meeting today is a concrete response to that determination. Now we must focus on which actions are the most necessary to guide our nations in pursuing a path towards peace, towards pluralism, tolerance and respect.

At the same time, we must be cautious and realistic about how much the honest teaching of this history can do. Let's not make the mistake of diluting, or even dishonoring, this history by considering it simply a vehicle for some other worthy goal. The Holocaust itself must always be taught with the importance and respect that it deserves. It is a noble goal to try to improve the

world we live in, but we must not dishonor the past in our efforts to do so. Interestingly, the history of the Holocaust seems to have greater import and effect as a guide towards tolerance when it is honored as the watershed event it was and continues to be. At the USHMM we are committed to teaching this history through the extensive historical documentation and exhibits on our web site, and the more tangible programs that we sponsor at the museum itself and in other cities throughout the United States. These are the principles that I believe can best guide our efforts to educate ourselves, our children, and future generations. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present them.